

November 27, 2002

Public Notice for 401 Certification

Lake Earl Flood Control Project Del Norte County

On January 16, 2001, the Regional Water Board issued an emergency Water Quality Certification to the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) to dredge sand from the sandbar between Lake Talawa and the Pacific Ocean in order to lower the water level in Lakes Talawa and Earl. The Water Quality Certification was issued pursuant to Section 401 of the Federal Clean Water Act and was in effect for two winter periods, ending on February 15, 2002. On October 1, 2002, the CDFG requested a one-year extension of the Water Quality Certification while the Lake Earl Wildlife Management Plan is being completed.

The proposed breaching will take place at the narrowest length of the sandbar between Lake Talawa and the Pacific Ocean, just north of Crescent City in Del Norte County, California. The purpose of the project is to lower the lake level to prevent flooding of public and private roads, and private property. The project will involve excavating a trench 200 feet long by 20 feet wide by 4 feet deep between Lake Talawa and the Pacific Ocean to start the flow of lake water (beginning elevation 10 feet) to the ocean (mean high water level 6.3 feet). Once the flow has started, it will increase rapidly, causing the erosion of much more of the sandbar. The estimated combined water volume of the lakes before breaching is 34,559 acre-feet. After breaching, the stored water volume would fluctuate between 2,574 and 18,000 acre-feet, depending on the tide. Access to the site is through the Pacific Shores subdivision. The area surrounding the breaching site consists of a broad sandy beach backed by extensive dunes.

The coastal lagoon system provides habitat for several endangered and threatened species. The effects of artificial breaching on these species are not well documented.

Work will begin when sufficient rainfall occurs that raises the lake levels to 8 feet MSL. Staff proposes to regulate this project under issuance of a Water Quality Certification Order pursuant to Section 401 of the Clean Water Act (33 USC 1341). Comments on this project should be submitted to Ben Zabinsky at zabib@rbl.swrcb.ca.gov within twenty-one days of the date of this notice.